

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
JANUARY 16, 2014**

**Present:** First Selectman Edward G. McAnaney, Joanne Sullivan, Mel Chafetz, Brian Fitzgerald and Timothy Reynolds. Patrick McMahon, Director of Economic and Community Development and John Cloonan, Director of Public Works were also invited to attend. First Selectman McAnaney called the meeting to order at 1:07 p.m.

Mr. McAnaney opened the meeting with the currently available information regarding the Bridge Street School

- The costs of renovation as estimated in August are \$2,704,000.
- There was a \$66,000 insurance check for the furnace.
- Temporary heating is operational. This cost about \$25,000 including \$4,900 to pay for the heating costs.
- This week the Board of Finance tabled the request for an additional \$15,000 for gutter and roof repair.
- There is no money in the budget for repairs to Bridge Street School. The monies being spent are being taken from contingency funds.

Where do we head in the long term?

The renovation costs are substantial and the Town budget has about \$3,000,000 available annually for capital projects, so if the focus was Bridge Street school, no other capital projects could be worked on.

There was a question about whether or not the entire project needed to be done at once.

The First Selectman noted that this meeting was intended to allow the Board of Selectmen to agree upon an approach to the building. He invited the residents to come to the next regular Board of Selectmen meeting to make public comment, if they wished.

First Selectman McAnaney noted that there is question whether or not the Board of Finance would be in support of spending money on the renovation. Selectman Sullivan suggested that the public attend a Board of Finance meeting to show their support.

First Selectman McAnaney noted that the \$3,000,000 available for capital projects in the upcoming fiscal year is planned to be used for the Library (the ADA project along with interior work), the Town Hall renovation, pension liability and roadwork.

Selectman Fitzgerald noted that the way to obtain funds is either through capital in the

regular budget process or through an appeal to the Town to use reserve funds.

Selectman Sullivan said we first need to hear from the public. She said there hasn't been a public hearing on this matter since she's been on the Board. Mrs. Sullivan said the least the Board can do is listen to the public. She noted that even though the Board of Selectmen do not have the final say on the matter they should show the Board of Finance that there are people interested. She also mentioned that fundraising could be done similar to the Senior Center project.

Selectman Sullivan made a motion to have a Public Hearing.

Selectman Chafetz stated that he thought the purpose of the meeting was not to talk about costs but to put together a process since the Board of Finance will not support the expenditures unless there is a use for the school.

First Selectman McAnaney agreed that it was a key decision. Should the building be for Town use (and what specific use) or leased out?

Selectman Sullivan noted that we rent space now and she doesn't expect government to get smaller. It doesn't make sense to rent when you own a building.

Selectman Chafetz said Parks and Rec is limited since they cannot do daytime programs during the school day. Bridge Street School is a viable use. Maybe combine rental and Town use. He suggested a committee be formed to define building use over a few months.

Selectman Fitzgerald said the question is, "Do we want to save that building?" He thinks the Town wants to but when you start talking big money they may waffle on it. But he would vote to keep the building. He doesn't believe the Town wants to level it and if that won't happen the Town cannot leave the building to deteriorate.

Selectman Reynolds stated that the only way to find out what the people in town really want is to have them vote. He suggested a day long referendum to ask the question whether or not to renovate the school for \$2.7 million dollars for possible use as Town offices or rental to private parties. Discussion followed about adding it to the November ballot but it was agreed that it needs to be determined sooner. Selectman Reynolds said a referendum would be the way to convince the Board of Finance to approve the project.

Selectman Chafetz stated that he didn't have a lot of confidence in referendums since people vote without being educated. He'd rather see a Town meeting where people can

listen and make an educated decision.

Selectman Fitzgerald said that the charter requires a Town meeting prior to a referendum. The Board of Selectmen can ignore the outcome of the Town meeting and still have a referendum. We must follow the process. Selectman Fitzgerald said the key is the Board of Finance.

First Selectman McAnaney agreed with Selectman Reynolds' idea.

Selectman Reynolds said we should have multiple Public Hearings, a Town meeting followed by a referendum. He also said the project should be done all at once and not piecemeal. Mr. McAnaney added that an over time approach causes the costs to increase.

At this time, Patrick McMahon was asked for his thoughts. He stated that the building itself is important to the Town. It is historic and has a place in the Town center. If it is torn down the entry to the Town will be a parking lot. The Town has tremendous resources to accomplish the project. Grant availability is dependent on use. If used as Town offices there would be no grants. If used for Park & Recs then there is a possibility for grants. Town Offices really should be at Town Hall. There should be one campus for all Town business. There was a plan for expansion of Town Hall to consolidate all offices which cost about \$1million. Mr. McMahon stated that the best use for Bridge Street school is Park & Rec and they have requested that space for years. Young families in Town would prefer to have daytime programs. The Friends of the Library would like to continue sorting books and they contribute \$20,000 annually to the library in book sales. There is a dance studio looking for a home and is interested in Bridge Street School. He believes there may be a way to get to that end.

Selectman Chafetz asked if the building can be designated historical? Mr. McMahon responded that it is already on the State register of Historic Places and if we applied it would be accepted to the National Register.

Selectman Reynolds asked what the benefit would be. Mr. McMahon replied it would provide the ability to get some smaller grants and for marketing.

Selectman Reynolds said, based on Mr. McMahon's comments, that he suggests the recommendation be changed to use the building for Parks & Recreation, potential private use and possible library book-sorting use instead of Town offices.

Selectman Reynolds thanked all of the public for attending the meeting and said that the

Board really needs to decide how to use the building and the residents will be invited to speak at the Public Hearings and Town Meeting.

Selectman Chafetz asked about using the building as a health club where Park & Recs charges to use it. Selectman McAnaney said that would probably be leased out to a health club rather than having to add town employees to run the health club.

Selectman Reynolds noted that the Selectmen insist that the Board of Finance attend the Public Hearings.

John Cloonan suggested that the Hazmat mitigation at a cost of \$210,000 be done regardless of the decision. Whether the building is renovated or razed the hazmat must be removed and costs will continue to rise.

Mr. Cloonan also noted that there is a capital project for Firehouse training facility for \$900,000. He suggested that perhaps Bridge Street School be utilized for that instead of an expansion to the main firehouse.

There was discussion about the K-9 training and it was agreed that it may be incompatible with the suggested usage.

There was additional discussion about fundraising whether it be naming rights, selling bricks for pathways or shares (as was done at Sunrise Park). Selectman Chafetz also said we could bond. Selectman Reynolds noted that was what he meant with his suggestion. First Selectman McAnaney said he'd rather look to other sources of funding instead of bonding.

Selectman Sullivan made a motion to have two Public Hearings with the proposed use of the Bridge Street School for Parks & Recreation, book sorting and possible lease use. The motion was seconded by Selectman Chafetz.

Selectman Chafetz noted that the Parks & Recreation Commission needs to take the lead to define usage. Lou Casinghino, chairman of Parks and Recreation was in attendance and was asked his opinion. He noted that this is the plan that their commission has been requesting and discussing for years. They cannot do daytime programs due to lack of facilities. He added the library book sorting is a viable use and the dance studio is another good use. Mr. Casinghino said Parks and Recreation agrees with the use of the building.

Vote 5-0 in favor.

Selectman Fitzgerald made a motion to adjourn at 2:09 p.m. Vote 5-0 in favor.

The next Selectmen's Meeting will be Wednesday, January 22, 2014.

Lisa Trase  
Recording Secretary